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MEDIÆVAL WOOD ARCHITECTURE IN GERMANY.

By

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At the close of the middle ages, and the times of German Renaissance, from the end of the fifteenth to the middle of the seventeenth century, there was to be found in several towns at the foot of the Hartz mountains, among which we may cite Brunswick, Halberstadt, Hildesheim and Goslar; and many in the valley of the Weser, as Hameln and Minden, a great number of well preserved timber houses, in which much of the sphere of thought which characterised the old artistic genius of Fatherland still remains to us.

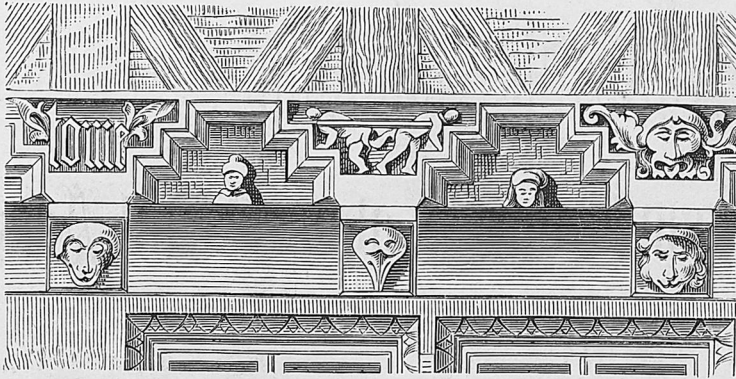
In these towns the timber framing was not confined to objects of secondary importance, it rather comprised the whole realm of secular architecture in towns and villages. The houses of the rich burghers and merchants, as well as the cottages of the artisans and even the public buildings, are many of them entirely in ornamental timber framing, less frequently built in stone in the lower story, and half-timbered in the upper, and that with such exuberance of rich ornamentation in the houses of the nobles and the public buildings, that they are not surpassed by the timber framework of other countries.

This woodwork does not belong to any province of art of higher order, or greater effect, as for the most part it is executed by the carpenter alone; yet when we look at it, we cannot but recognise the fancy peculiar to it, and the genius that pervades it. A feeling of melancholy affects the spectator as he views these artistic creations of a bygone period and compares with them the flat, unartistic timber houses so wholly destitute of all style which characterise our own times.

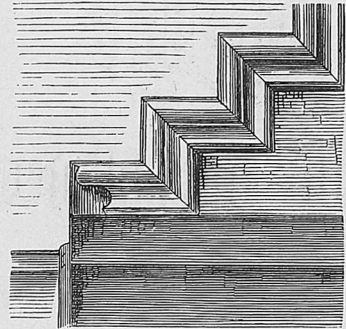
The ground plan also, which generally still shows the purely mediæval disposition of the localities, and the interior finishing of these old timber houses, are in perfect harmony with the architectonic execution of the exterior, and are based upon solid principles which differ altogether from our modern disposition of secular buildings. In the ground plan of these old buildings which are often of very important dimension, the first and principal condition is that each house should be adapted for one single family, and accordingly that the extent of the building as well as its arrangement, and its interior and exterior appointments should be made dependent on the requirements and fortune of the owner.

From the middle of the fifteenth century, especially in Brunswick and Halberstadt, there occurs a novelty in the position of the buildings, namely that the gables are no longer, as in the mediæval houses, towards the streets, but the fronts with their eaves disposed parallel to them. In the above named places there are but few buildings to be found of which the gables are towards the street, while on the other hand, this mediæval custom has been retained much longer in the towns of the Weser valley, and there are still to be seen in Münden and Hexter timber houses of the middle of the seventeenth century, the fronts of which show gables parallel to the street. In some of the narrow streets of Münden, with their small and many storied houses, large dormer windows in the form of gables rise over the eaves which lie towards the street.

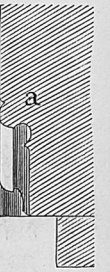
The construction of the timber framing is in principle



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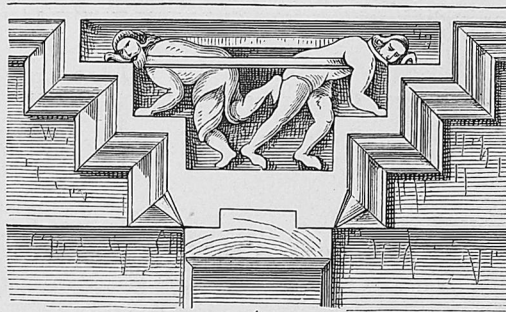


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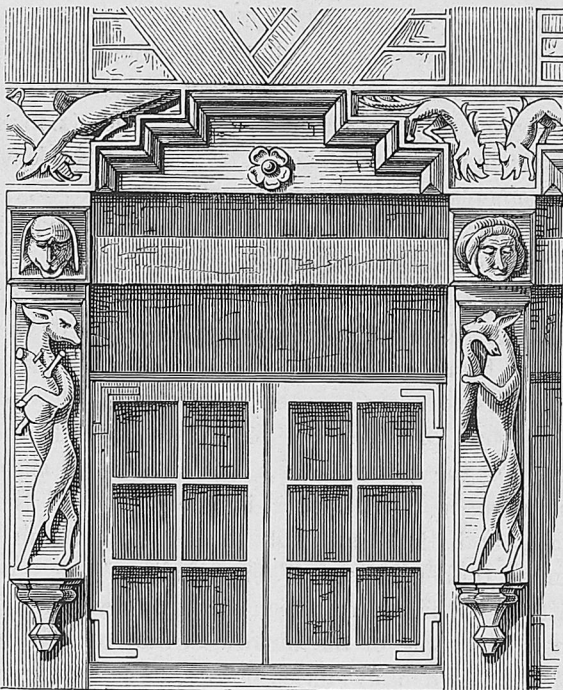
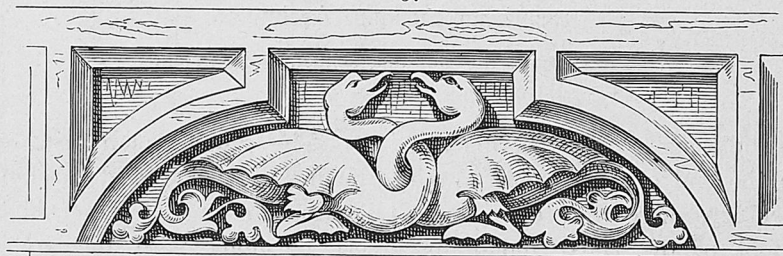
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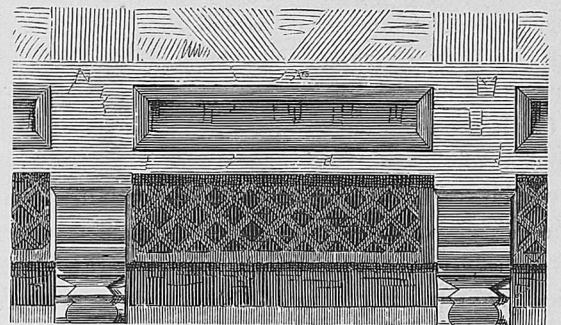


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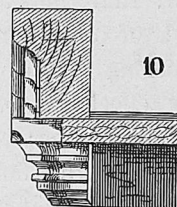
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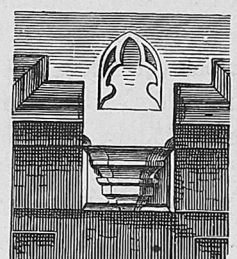
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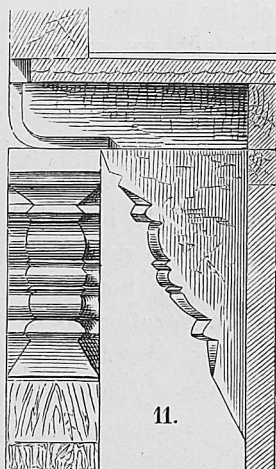


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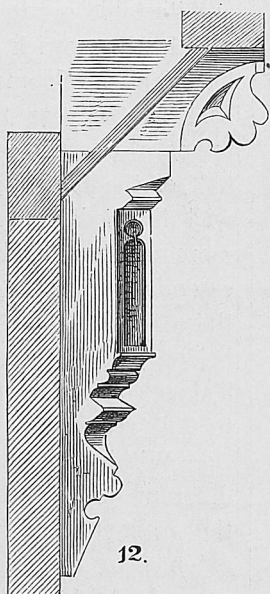


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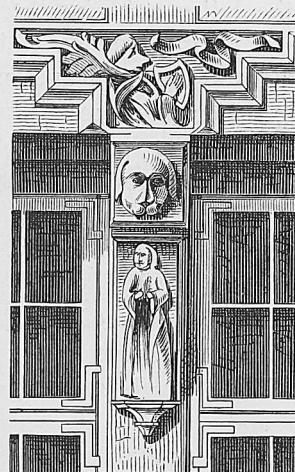
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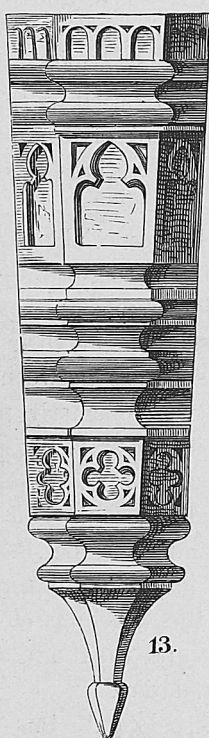
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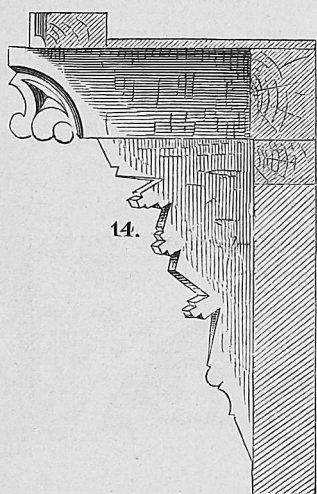
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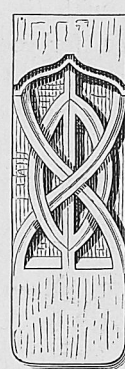
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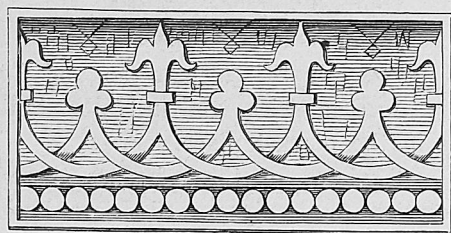
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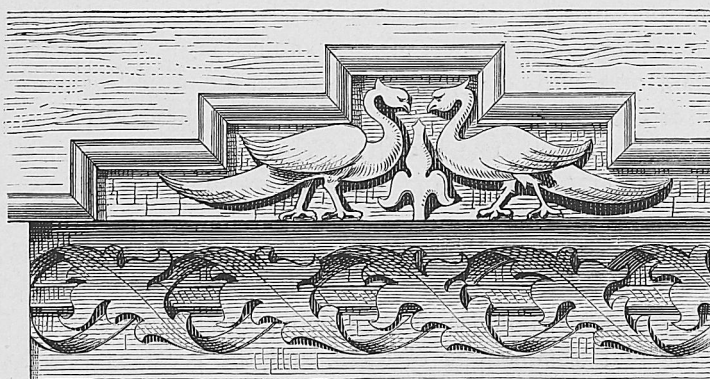
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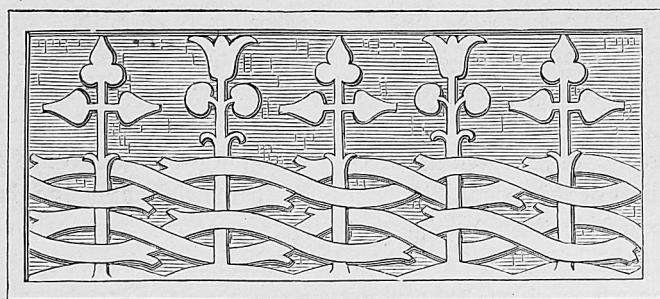
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similar to the method of the present day, and differs from the latter only by the position of the joists, the arrangement and trussing of the posts in connexion with the windows, the form and ornamentation of the timber framing. For the present article some constructional remarks on the position of the joists are essential, while other constructive differences are of little importance.

In the disposition of the joists there are three cases to be distinguished.

1. The position of the joists of subordinate stories and mezzanines.
2. Their usual position between the principal stories; and
3. Their position below the garrets in the roof.

The joists of mezzanines and under the garrets are not marked on the outside, the joists being tenoned and mortised with the principal supports and posts, and being sometimes only to be recognised by the projecting ends of the tenons.

It is different with the framing of the joists between the principal stories, for these, on the contrary, are made distinctly conspicuous, and are visible from a distance through their marked projections. This projection of the upper stories over the lower ones is generally seen in the old framework buildings, and is in a certain degree the characteristic peculiarity of them. It is such an original and picturesque feature that it becomes the most fruitful element for the further development of these buildings.

In Brunswick and Halberstadt there are houses four stories high, in which the front of the upper story projects so much as five feet beyond that of the groundfloor. The particular projections of the several stories generally vary from one foot to two feet eight inches.

A necessary consequence of this projection is the introduction of a particular panelling between the projecting ends of the joists, the plate of the upper partition and the head of that underneath, for which purpose plaster and plain boarding, and later ornamental wood panels were employed.

Another consequence more necessary in an æsthetic than in a constructive point of view is the introduction of brackets or trusses under the projecting joists' heads, the carving and ornamenting of these, and the breaking and chamfering of the edges of plates and panels.

The projection of the stories in these timber frame buildings not only effects additional space for the upper story, and gives a protection to those beneath, but by the weight which thus rests upon the projecting ends of the joists forms an essential counterpoise to their curvature.

It is very probable that several other circumstances have contributed to the production of this peculiarity, but it is the æsthetic idea which manifests itself in the projecting joists and their architectonic application which is of the greatest interest. When we consider that several of these old timber houses, which are built within courts, have no such projections, we may conclude that these

projections are exclusively intended and employed for the architectonic ornamentation of the façade.

In Brunswick and Halberstadt we can follow the historical development of this old woodwork style so far back as the year 1450, and in the other above named towns also are wooden buildings to be found of the last half of the fifteenth century, but these old houses are so well finished that there is but little to be found in the more modern buildings, which can be described as any essential progress. The most modern houses, on which there is still some kind of decorative attempts to be seen belong to the second half of the seventeenth century. Taken collectively they extend over a space of from 200 to 250 years.

Within this interval we can clearly distinguish four different and clearly defined periods. The first comprises the most ancient and purely mediæval examples, and extends to the end of the fifteenth century. This may properly be termed the gothic period of ornamental timber framework, distinguished and recognised by the sober employment of the constructive element of decoration in a purely technical sense without any antique and symbolical reminiscences.

The decoration of this period is especially limited to the emphasising the most essential structural elements, particularly on the plates, the joist ends and brackets. The other structural parts are shown in their naked form, with the exception of the panels between joists, partition head and plate, which were formerly painted, and the doors and gateways with their richly profiled and sometimes ornamented frames.

In Brunswick and Halberstadt there is still extant a rather large number of old timber frame houses of this period, which however are gradually disappearing, sanitary considerations requiring the widening of the old narrow streets of mediæval times and their alteration in consequence of the increasing population.

The most striking projections belong to this period; they vary from 18 to 32 inches.

As representative houses of this art period we may name that of Gröckel in Scharrenstrasse and Bosse's in Gördelingstrasse in Brunswick, and in Halberstadt several timber houses in the market place.

On the wall plates of these houses there is seen with few exceptions a deeply carved frieze broken into zig-zag lines (Fig. 1) called a stair frieze. This originates from the weakening and carving of the rough moulding of the wood; not being applied or added it is quite in accordance with the principles of the Gothic. The moulding is made according to variously combined rounds and hollows generally like the profile represented in Fig. 2 a. Sometimes however other kinds of mouldings occur, of which Figs. 3 and 5 are specimens, the first from a house in Brunswick and the last in Halberstadt. The empty spaces above and between the stair frieze, and similar mouldings in some particularly well finished buildings, as seen in Figs. 1, 4—6, 16 and 25, are filled in with foliage ornaments, figures in half relief or inscriptions either single or in groups. Thus the old Sper-

ling house in Brunswick has in these places, besides an inscription referring to the date of its erection, the figures represented in Fig. 4, of two men back to back who seem to be occupied in dragging one another backwards and forwards by means of two pieces of wood joined together by a rope, one of which each of the men holds in his mouth, while one administers a kick to the other. Near these figures, in the adjoining panel to the right (Fig. 1), is introduced a head with the tongue protruded as if in mockery of their trouble. This dragging backwards and forwards, which is also introduced over one of the doors of the Guildhall at Hannover, is supposed by some to be a punishment common in the middle ages, by others a game usual at carnival time, known under the name of the *luderspiel*.

The joist heads of the projecting stories usually finish in the more richly ornamental buildings, Figs. 1, 6-9 and 16 in some wonderful heads of animals or men, in the more simple houses on the contrary in a common rounding off with chamfers as in Fig. 11, or in patterns according to Figs. 3, 12, 14 and 15 or sometimes in a kind of console as in Fig. 10.

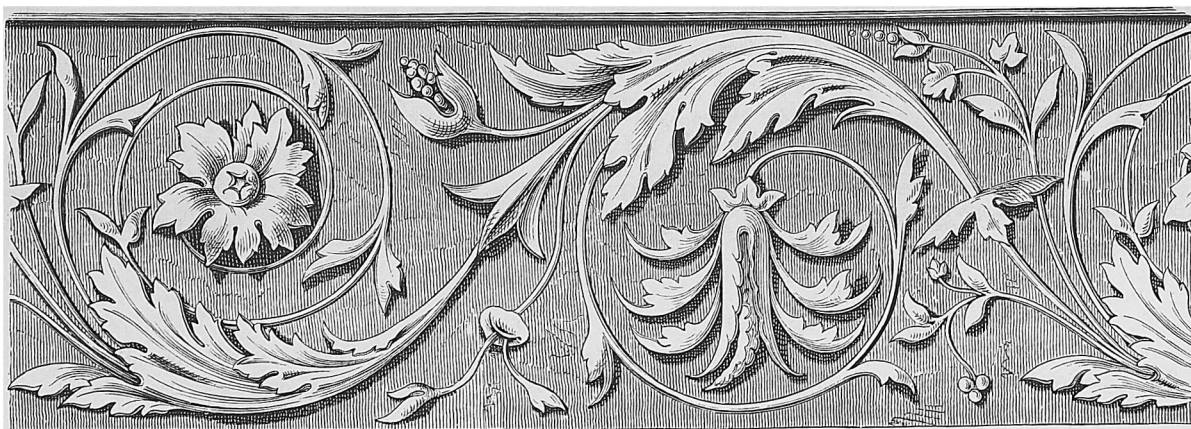
The brackets under the projecting beam ends are plain and have no abutment, being nailed on to the posts, and their slender forms correspond very happily to the true or only simulated method of construction. The ornamentation of these brackets in several Halberstadt houses consists in rich mouldings, as in Figs. 12 and 13, in a still larger number of houses in Brunswick in designed patterns, as in Figs. 11 and 14, while frequently small sacred and profane figures or animals are carved upon them, as in Figs. 6, 15 and 18, or strongly

projecting ornaments as in Figs. 19 and 20. Figs. 6, 15 and 16 as well as Figs. 19 and 20 are from Brunswick, 17 and 18 from Halberstadt.

The intervening space between the projecting joists, the lower partition head and the plate was generally filled up during this period by loam and straw work between the projecting joists, or by panels. The mediæval workmen seem simply to have continued the loam and straw work of the ceiling between the joists, and to have walled up the rest of the opening over the partition frame. This was the most primitive method; it is still found in Brunswick in almost all the timber-frame houses of this oldest period, even in those most richly ornamented, as for example in 6 and 16 on the Gröckel and Bosse houses, and as in Figs. 10 and 11 on others.

In outbuildings the space between the lower frame and the projecting partition plate is sometimes only filled in with flooring boards as in Fig. 14. Besides the loam and straw work is found also oblique boarding between frame and upper plate, which appears to have had originally a rich diaper-like decoration, either painted, or more rarely with a light carving on the groundwork; this decoration however is so much damaged by later white-washings and the tooth of time that it can rather be guessed at than recognised. Figs. 22, 23 and 25 show some specimens of such painted ornamentation from Brunswick; they are of a yellow tint with blue lines on the edge on a dark blue ground. Figs. 23 and 25 show some other specimens, painted and in relief from Halberstadt. Besides these, there is in an outbuilding in Brunswick a different filling in, consisting, Fig. 3, of a trellis-work of diagonally placed laths.

SPECIMENS OF ORNAMENTATION.



No. 1. Italian. Renaissance Ornament from Church *dei Eremitani* in Padua. Gold on blue Ground.